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Contribution by Women

Women, water, sanitation and human settlements — on track or distracted?*

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I. Introduction

1. Water, sanitation and human settlements, the themes to be considered at the twelfth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, form an essential part of women's lives, livelihoods and security. The present paper reflects the views of the Women's Major Group on the themes. It also highlights a gender-specific approach to water, sanitation and human settlements, an approach that is shared by, and is beneficial to, a broad range of stakeholders.

2. Discussions at the global level related to women and water began at the 1977 United Nations Water Conference at Mar del Plata, continued at the 1992 International Conference on Water and Environment in Dublin, and were consolidated into concrete actions on women's involvement in water-related decision-making and management in chapter 18 of Agenda 21. Principle 20 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development states: "Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development."

3. At the 2000 Millennium Summit, 191 Governments reaffirmed their commitment to women's empowerment, agreeing in the United Nations Millennium Declaration to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable. The Millennium Development Goals related to poverty, gender equality, and improving access to water and the lives of slum-dwellers, are particularly relevant to the Commission's themes at its twelfth session, setting relevant benchmarks and indicators. However, the Millennium Development Goals will not be achieved without approaching these goals in a holistic manner that puts gender equality and human rights at the centre. To date, none of the national reports on achieving the Millennium Development Goals has mentioned gender equality or women's access to natural resources in relation to goal 7 — halving the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water by 2015 and achieving significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers by 2020.

4. Article 24 of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development, underlines that the implementation of Millennium Development Goal 7 should be gender-sensitive. Governments also agreed to: "Mobilize international and domestic financial resources at all levels, transfer technology, promote best practices and support capacity-building for water and sanitation infrastructure and services development, ensuring that such infrastructure and services meet the needs of the poor and are gender-sensitive." The Johannesburg Plan of Implementation also supports the participation of women in decision-making related to water resources management and women's right to inherit land in Africa.

5. Female water professionals and women's groups joined forces and succeeded in putting women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming on the international water agenda. During the Second World Water Forum in the Hague in 2000 women were recognized as a major group. The 2001 International Conference on Freshwater in Bonn stated that men and women should have an equal voice in managing water resources, and that water management policies should distinguish water users by gender to allow for equitable access. At the 2003 Third World Water Forum in Japan, Governments agreed to "ensure good governance with a stronger focus on household and neighbourhood community-based approaches by addressing equity in

sharing benefits, with due regard to pro-poor and gender perspectives in water policies". The 1994 United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa commits Governments to support capacity-building and women's full participation to combat desertification and to mitigate the effects of drought. The 1996 second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) meeting in Istanbul made a commitment to gender equality in human settlements development. In addition, global agreements related to gender equality and women's empowerment address the management of water resources, including the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

6. Thus, for more than 25 years global United Nations conferences have repeatedly recognized that effective sustainable water resources management depends on the involvement of women in decision-making and on mainstreaming gender at all levels. At its twelfth session, the Commission will consider whether Governments and other institutions have taken action that reflects the gender dimensions of water, sanitation and human settlements. Some countries, such as South Africa, Uganda, Kenya, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Chile and Brazil, have taken steps to integrate a gender perspective into their water management policies. Some global processes are supportive, while others seem to be obstacles to achieving global benchmarks and objectives. The key question remains: Is implementation of the global commitments related to poverty, water, sanitation, human settlements and gender on track, off track, or distracted?

7. The present paper identifies new developments and challenges from a gender perspective. It highlights opportunities and obstacles in regard to both water and sanitation and human settlements, and concludes with a set of recommendations for the Commission at its twelfth session and the sessions in years ahead. The document is illustrated by case studies, reflecting the endurance, knowledge and strength of women in different regions of the world in managing water, sanitation and human settlements in a sustainable manner.

II. Lessons learned on water and sanitation

8. Water is essential for all forms of life and access to clean water is a human right. The right to water and housing is essential for achieving other international development commitments in critical areas such as gender equality, sustainable development and poverty eradication.

9. Women constitute more than 50 per cent of the world population. In many communities, the survival of women and their households depends on access to and control of natural resources, especially water. However, limited access to and control of clean water is intensifying the cycle of poverty, gender inequalities, and water-borne diseases. And there are no indications that a major global shift is taking place, which will transform and reverse the cycle.

10. Women and men have distinct responsibilities and different stakes in using and managing water and water systems. As economic providers, caregivers and household managers, women ensure that their families have water for daily lives. In most societies, women and girls collect every litre of water for cooking, bathing, cleaning, maintaining health and hygiene, raising small livestock and growing food. All these tasks are water-intensive. Women also use water for economic activities,

building and repair work, crops and food processing. Generally, men are in need of water for irrigation and maintaining larger livestock, and for industries. Sometimes women's needs are in direct conflict with those of men. And men are usually less concerned with how and where the water women use is obtained, and at what price as long as they do not share in the costs.

11. Women carry out 80 per cent of water-related work throughout the world. They are often the managers of community water supply, have extensive knowledge and experience, and have learned to protect water resources in order to preserve them for future generations. And women are seldom consulted and too often ignored when policies and plans are being drafted and projects implemented. In every region of the world, women's organizations and networks have played a key role in managing water, thus contributing to poverty eradication and sustainable development. However, many of these organizations often lack resources and capacity fully to implement their programmes and projects and broaden their efforts.

12. Every day rural women and children, particularly girls, walk long distances over dangerous terrain to bring water and fuel to their families. Women often spend four to five hours per day carrying heavy containers and suffer acute physical problems — a burden that is made worse in drought-prone or polluted areas. For example, in Rajasthan, India, it is not unusual for women to walk 6 kilometres to bring water for the home. In some mountainous regions of East Africa, women spend up to 27 per cent of their caloric intake in collecting water.

13. Travelling long distances from home in search of water sources increases the labour burden for women and limits time for other activities, including income-generating work and education. If water and fuel sources are scarce, time for girls to attend school and study is also limited. Girls may even be forced to drop out of school to assist in collecting water or as a result of limited facilities and water supplies for sanitation and personal hygiene. Also, trekking distances to access water sources or facilities places women and girls in danger of being victims of physical violence. In India, caste-based discrimination limits access to safe and adjacent water sources to members of the upper caste, causing social tensions and violence.

14. In urban areas women and girls wait hours in line for intermittent water supplies. This also means that many have no time for other pursuits, such as education, income-generation and cultural and political activities.

Box 1

In Nepal, about 200 families in villages in Ramechhap district have struggled with acute water shortages for the past few years. They have just one source for drinking: a natural spring. Families sometimes have to wait for hours to collect a single bucket of water. "Night and day, the spring is ever occupied by containers and people", says Jhuma Sherstha, a local woman standing in the queue. "We rely on the spring just for drinking water. For washing, bathing and providing water to our animals, we go to the faraway Khahare stream."

Source: *Kathmandu Post*, 2003.

15. As water is fundamental to life, water management must be democratic and transparent, and represent the needs of the people — none more important than women. However, only a few women are in positions of power when it comes to decision-making on water resources. Although the principles of Integrated Water Resources Management include a gender perspective, women continue to be ignored in policies, projects and institutions dealing with water resources management. Women's participation, especially that of poor women and indigenous women, in water-related decision-making is limited, and water governance does not take into account gender-differentiated responsibilities and needs related to water. Current methods of managing resources are gender-blind and reinforce stereotypical roles and social norms, directing technical and financial control to the male community members. There is also a need to involve men in safe water provisions, in order to change these stereotypes. Moreover, including a gender perspective in water resource management has been proved to be cost-effective.

Box 2

A study from Chile in 2000 showed that the governmental institutions working on water resources have a very low percentage of women at the devisor and planning levels. This percentage rises just a little at the technical and professional levels. The number of women who annually obtain a university hydraulics civil engineer degree is very limited. Over the past two years the Dirección General de Aguas, the governmental regulatory agency concerned with water resource management, has started to develop educational programmes about resources management for schoolchildren, headed by a team of women civil engineers and geographers. In this area it seems that the gender participation and commitment is very high and strong, promoting a new water culture, based on sharing and conflict resolution.

Source: María Angélica Alegría, "Water Resources Management in Chile: Gender Participation", 2002, presented at Women's Worlds 2002: the eighth annual Interdisciplinary Congress on Women, Gendered Worlds: Gains and Challenges, Kampala, Uganda.

16. Caste- and class-based discrimination and resultant violence is seen in large parts of India and elsewhere in the world. Access to adjacent and safe water sources is limited to members of the upper caste or class and other women have to travel long distances for the same. These situations result in social tension and violence.

17. Low-income women facing time constraints are sometimes forced to accept lower quality water — often groundwater that is not clean enough for consumption. Polluted and contaminated water directly threatens family health and wellness, whereas the awareness level of women regarding contamination of water is often poor. In Bangladesh, well water is poisoned by arsenic; in India, fluoride content is causing the debilitating disease fluorosis; and in areas where privatization has increased the cost of water, women cannot afford clean water and must rely on disease-ridden sources. As women are the primary water managers at the local level, they are more likely to be exposed to water-borne diseases, especially when their awareness level regarding contaminated water is poor. Just as 90 per cent of all

illnesses are transmitted by contaminated water, 70 per cent of the world's blind are women who have been infected by the water-borne disease trachoma, either through direct contact with infected water or through their children. Unfortunately, the majority of resources are allocated towards curing water-related illnesses, instead of preventative measures such as adequate sanitation and hygiene education.

18. Women are also the primary caretakers for family members who are ill, and the impact of HIV/AIDS has been particularly devastating in this regard. In addition to higher numbers of women being infected, the HIV/AIDS epidemic puts an extra work burden on women's shoulders, including care for infected family members, time taken away from income-generating activities and education, and the need for increased amounts of water.

19. Saline water ingression and resultant brackishness of drinking water tube wells is a major concern in many coastal zones, such as coastal India. This forces the local communities to obtain unsafe drinking water from shallow tube wells, which are often contaminated.

20. Women face a disproportionate amount of economic and social losses from floods, dam construction and water pollution. In Bangladesh, the normal responsibilities of women increase during the flood season. The rising number of households headed by females is particularly important because of economic and social marginalization, as well as limited access to flood relief and rehabilitation. Many of these women resort to a pattern of emergency borrowing or selling of assets, such as jewellery and utensils. Women tend to be at greater risk than men of long-term economic loss, because of the societal devaluation of their assets.

Box 3

The International Fund for Agricultural Development has highlighted the fact that women head an increasing number of rural households — already one out of four — in the developing world. In sub-Saharan Africa this is as high as one household in three. These women are put in the position of farming the land and providing for their families alone, without the benefit of legal rights to land and water.

Source: Maria Angélica Alegria 2004 and Gender and Water Alliance, 2003, "The Gender and Water Development Report 2003: Gender Perspectives on Policies in the Water Sector" Gender and Water Alliance (http://www.genderandwateralliance.org/reports/GWA%20Annual%Report.pdf).

21. When water becomes scarce, one of the coping strategies employed by women is buying water from vendors. This does not guarantee quality, and high prices contribute to a class division in affordability of such resources. This puts an extra stress on low-income women.

Box 4

On the outskirts of Cairo, which is not serviced by the public system, the Government allows private distribution of water. Vendors sell water at prices 5 to 10 times higher than the government utilities charge, and it is delivered in unhygienic tankers.

Source: Samia Galal Saad, Alexandira University, Egypt.

22. The environmental and human implications of water scarcity have not received enough attention. As a result, wetlands, floodplains and coastal ecosystems are in danger of irreversible degradation, and this reality comes with gender-related consequences. It is poor families who draw most heavily on "common property" resources, such as forests, rangelands, water bodies and landlocked fishing sources. Women suffer disproportionately when such resources are degraded. Conservation of water ecosystems is critical for the improvement of women's access to clean water, and for the survival of poor families and communities.

23. In many cases access to water is linked to land rights — which are embedded in either national law and/or customary and religious laws, and in many parts of the world women's right to own or inherit land is prohibited. While women perform the majority of the world's agricultural work, they often do not have secure land tenure. Extremely complicated land records and ownership related procedures are a major deterrent. If women do have access to land, the plot is often poor quality soil or does not provide sufficient access to irrigation. Because land is used as collateral to obtain credit, many women are barred from financial independence. Although the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has been ratified by a large majority of the world's Governments, broader implementation of the Convention with regard to natural resources is needed. The United Republic of Tanzania and Nepal have successfully used the Convention to expand constitutional guarantees of equality to access land and other natural resources. These approaches could be adopted in other countries.

Box 5

Carmen Deere and Magdalena Leon conducted a study in 1998 on the gender impacts of land and water rights from the land reforms of the 1960s and the 1970s to the neo-liberal counter reforms of the 1990s in nine countries of Latin America. The study showed that despite the salutary effect of the reforms on land redistribution and rural poverty, they served to accentuate women's economic dependency and marginalization. The requirements that beneficiaries be heads of households (generally male), and permanent agricultural workers (again mostly male), exclude most women from land ownership. As water in Latin America is mostly tied to land ownership or legally recognized community ownership, women thereby lost any legal claim to water and their stake in its management.

Source: Maria Angélica Alegria/Gender and Water Alliance, 2004.

24. Water scarcity is increasingly becoming a trigger for military conflict, notably in the Middle East and Mexican Valley.[1] The growing number of conflicts and wars leads to increasing numbers of displaced people and refugees, the majority of who are women and children. The loss of land and water sources causes even more insecurity among refugees, and puts an extra burden on women. Securing access to land and safe water are major challenges for the resettlement of women refugees and their families.

25. Few development issues demonstrate the gender divide in human society more graphically than sanitation. As the traditional water managers and custodians of family health, women shoulder a huge burden in coping with the lack of basic sanitation services. The lack of sanitation facilities has significantly different impacts on women and men. In rural areas, owing to deforestation and the expansion of cultivation, women must wake up even earlier in the morning to attend to their needs. Similar societal pressures for privacy do not put the same onus on men. Because of the absence of clean and private sanitation facilities in schools, 10 per cent of school-age girls in Africa do not attend school during menstruation. There is also a violence dimension to this: in both urban and rural areas, women and girls have been raped and assaulted when attempting to go out to defecate in the dark in insecure places far from their homes. The lack of easy access to sanitation facilities is also an important cause for the high prevalence of urinary tract infections in women and girls. Proper sanitation facilities are a top priority for women and girls.

26. In every corner of the globe, women have proved to be strong advocates for their own concerns regarding water. Human rights advocates recognize access to and control of water as a critical component of gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as environmental security and poverty eradication. Women have protested the lack of water services from the Ukraine to Bolivia to the United States of America. They have organized for water conservation, from the Chipko movement in the North of India to the Narmada Bachao Andolan movement in India protesting the Narmada dam, and many others in Indonesia, Burkina Faso and Kenya. New international networks like the Gender and Water Alliance have been formed to collect and exchange information and strengthen technical capacity on gender, water and sanitation. The cases presented in this paper are an illustration of some of those efforts.

III. Lessons learned on human settlements

27. Human settlements are the physical spaces where women, their families and their communities live and work. Women's aspirations for themselves and the lives of their children, families, neighbourhoods and communities are articulated in terms of changes they would like to see in their settlements — whether these changes are in the form of secure housing, food security, health-care facilities, schools, safe transport, childcare, clean water supply or sanitation. Women's restricted mobility and gender roles also mean that they need to find work close to their homes.

28. Most women do not own the homes they live in or the lands they work on. Inheritance and property rights (both legal and customary) work in favour of men. This leaves women vulnerable in times of conflict, and it means that they have little say in decisions to invest in or divest from household assets. On the other hand

when women have access and control over economic assets it provides them leverage in household and community decision-making processes.

Box 6

Swayam Shikshan Prayog in India has facilitated the formation of over 1,000 women's savings and credit groups who have mobilized their own savings to provide loans for one another. These groups are organized into federations that have the ability to leverage bulk loans from banks. In addition to the benefits of having access and control over a financial resource base, savings and credit groups are also the unit through which women start organizing to address development issues in their settlements such as access to electricity, water supply, health care, schools, etc.

Source: www.groots.org.

29. Women's safety in settlements is a serious concern for women. The possibility of violence and crime, in particular in times of ethnic tension and conflict severely constrain women's mobility.

Box 7

In Montreal the Women's Urban Safety Action Committee, a partnership comprising grass-roots women, city planners and local authorities and researchers, came together to create a women-friendly transport system where women feel safe using public transport at night.

Source: www.groots.org.

30. In addition, women with children need access to child-friendly spaces for education, childcare and recreation. Mother's centres in Germany, the Czech Republic, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Slovenia are where grass-roots women have located or built spaces in which women with families can meet and address questions of family policy.

31. The roles that society ascribes to men and women mean that men and women use their living and working environments in very different ways — yet women and their needs are frequently excluded from decision-making processes at community, local government and national government levels.

32. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has had devastating effects on women living in poverty. Limited access and control of economic assets impede women's ability to negotiate safe sexual practices, and can result in the pursuit of sex work for survival or remaining in sexually risky or violent relationships.[2] While the policy discussions focus on preventive strategies or access to medical treatment, little attention has been paid to ways in which women are coping with the pandemic. Because women are the primary caregivers in Africa, this places huge burdens on women.

Inequitable inheritance practices coupled with land grabbing create a situation in which households headed by women are all the more vulnerable and food insecure.[3]

Box 8

Groots (Kenya) is a network of grass-roots women's organizations in Kenya where women have organized community safety nets to provide home-based care to people living with HIV/AIDS, to take care of orphans and elderly, to assist community members access medical centres and to provide food to the sick and their families. In the absence of any institutional support for such work, women have been mobilizing their own meagre resources to support these efforts.

Source: www.groots.org.

33. Women also bear the brunt of destruction wrought by disasters. Usually, women are the ones who play a central role in the processes of recovery of their communities and the reconstruction of their settlements.

34. In post-disaster experiences in India and Turkey, it is evident that investing in women's leadership in times of crises has accelerated community reconstruction and recovery processes and reconfigured the power relationships among women, communities and Government. This transformation has had a long-term impact in strengthening women's participation in development processes.[4]

35. For women to participate most effectively in decision-making processes they need to be present in larger numbers (at least 30 per cent)[5] and they require information and the support of organized women's groups to identify and articulate gender interests to build confidence so that they are effective and accountable in public positions. This is particularly critical for increasing poor women's political participation.

Box 9

In Uganda the Women's Caucus worked to keep women members of the National Parliament informed of women's priorities and how they could intervene in official debates. Forum for Women in Democracy in Uganda has also been involved in training women on doing gender analysis of budgets allocated at local and national levels.

Source: www.groots.org.

36. The essential role that urban women play in urban development and social organization needs constant attention. Important drivers are international organizations such as the international network of Grassroots Organizations Operating Together in Sisterhood (Groots), supporting communities in urban and rural settings. The Huairou Commission advocates for a gender perspective at international levels, for example during global Habitat meetings. Engendering local Agenda 21 processes, such as promoted by the non-governmental organization

Network for Human Development (REDEH) in Brazil, is also a powerful strategy to bring a gender perspective into urban development (see www.groots.org and www.huairou.org).

37. Participants at the Grassroots Women's International Academy convened by Groots International and the Huairou Commission during the special session of the General Assembly to review and appraise the implementation of the Habitat Agenda (June 2001) recommended that Governments should support grass-roots women's initiatives in three ways:

(a) Resources, for grass-roots women's collectives for their learning processes and learning exchanges;

(b) Visibility and opportunities for women's initiatives to engage with mainstream institutions;

(c) Policy support that encourages grass-roots women's participation in shaping policies that impact their well-being.

IV. Trends and developments: challenges ahead

38. This section describes major trends and developments in the field of gender, water, sanitation and human settlements. In the context of new perspectives and commitments in the field of sustainable and equitable development, globalization, environmental change and growing insecurity, the following trends have a major impact on women's relationship to water, sanitation and human settlements.

A. Water as a human right

39. The right to water is clearly established under international human rights law: all people have the right of access to the amount of water required to sustain life and fulfil basic needs.[6] In 2002 the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in its general comment No. 15, recognized water as a human right: "The human right to water is indispensable for leading a life in human dignity ... the right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible water for personal and domestic uses." In the same comment the commission mentions that people may not "be deprived of its means of subsistence".

40. The right to water has been identified as a component of the right to housing, the right to the highest attainable standard of health, and the right to food under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the world's most important social and economic rights treaty.[6] Human rights standards are applicable to Governments (and other actors) no matter how they arrange water services. These standards include the requirement that drinking water be available and accessible without discrimination.

41. In South Africa a minimum amount of water is made available free of charge to all citizens. The relatively affluent tax income base of the country facilitates this measure. This shows also that there is a need for progressive water tariffs, and subsidies for connection fees, etc., in order to guarantee access to a minimum amount of affordable water, particularly for the poor.

42. Presently there is mainly a competition-based approach to Integrated Water Resources Management, where ministers and more powerful stakeholders lobby for water rights. The competitive approach tends to focus on issues of legal water rights, often associated with land rights. With most land owned by men, water rights accordingly are awarded to men and not to women.

Box 10

Water access for the people of Zaragosa Island in the Philippines depends on the ebb of the tide. At high tide, a group of mostly women and children paddle their small boats to a single communal faucet on the mainland provided by the municipal government. They collect water in plastic containers, bathe and do laundry. Many spend two hours per day paddling back and forth, as well as a considerable amount of time waiting for their turn at the tap. There are communal faucets on the island, but they do not operate well. Scenes like this repeat themselves across the Philippines. That is why the recently concluded National Rural Women's Congress, attended by 280 participants from rural women's organizations, called for increased access to water services as a human right. It asked the government to prioritize public spending on basic social services, over national debt appropriation, which consumes 48 per cent of the national budget.

Source: Agnes Balota, Tambuyog Development Centre.

B. Privatization of water resources

43. The effects of globalization are increasingly uneven, and have a clear gender dimension. Privatization is one aspect of the world's water crisis that is having a deeply negative impact on the livelihoods of women. Increasingly, water resources management in countries across the globe is being determined by policies of the international financial and trade institutions — the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization. Privatization has been instigated through structural adjustment programmes, debt loan conditions, poverty reduction strategies, international development assistance, and "trade-related" policies under regional trade agreements such as the North America Free Trade Agreement and the Free Trade Area of the Americas negotiations.

44. Providing basic human services is increasingly difficult for countries crippled by debt and restricted by structural adjustment policies that prioritize loan repayment over social spending. As Governments relinquish control of domestic water systems under pressure from international institutions and regional banks and trade agreements, transnational corporations are gaining unprecedented access to national and local water supplies.

45. The global trend towards privatization of what have traditionally been public services has reduced the democratic involvement of both citizens and Governments in water management decisions.[7] Governments tend to lose internal skills and expertise, while the concentration of power in the hands of a single corporation and the inability of Governments to reclaim management of water services allow

corporations to impose their interests on Governments. As water becomes profit-driven, water resources management lacks commitment to expanded access to low-income consumers, resulting in service cut-offs, weak regular oversight, lack of accountability to local consumer needs and inequitable quality of services based on the ability to pay (i.e., affordability), rather than willingness to pay.

46. The privatization of water, and indeed all other natural resources, is increasingly infringing on people's rights and livelihoods around the world, most severely on poor women and girls. Water privatization perpetuates gender inequalities by relying on traditional gender roles that have made women and girls responsible for and the main suppliers of water to their families and households. Women are disproportionately experiencing the burdens of privatization policies in the form of astronomical price hikes, water cut-offs, deteriorating water quality, and health and sanitation hazards. Overall, the choices that poor women must make are not taken into account.

47. Women have been central in the struggle against the sale of public water services to transnational corporations, e.g., in Cochabamba, Bolivia, Atlanta, United States, and Dar es Salaam (see also box 11 below). Recognizing the human right to water, they claim that Governments should keep their responsibility for public services and common resources, guaranteeing safe access to clean and affordable water resources, particularly for the poor and women.

Box 11

In the region of Maldonado in Uruguay, water service was not a problem until it was privatized in a process that faced popular resistance, lacked any formal public consultation and followed a policy shaped by agreements with international financial institutions. In the poorer areas, neighbourhood organizations fought to defend community standpipes. The standpipes were installed in different zones around the country by the public water and sanitation ministry to assure that potable water was available in areas that lacked piped services to households. When the private companies stepped in, their first move was to eliminate the standpipes, a strategy designed to make people pay high fees for a household connection. Citizens unable to pay would lose water access.

The neighbourhood commission of the San Antonio district, run primarily by women, successfully lobbied local authorities to maintain the community tap. Now the neighbourhood standpipe not only supplies water to families there, but also to neighbours from other districts where standpipes have been removed or household water connections cut off owing to the inability to pay the high water rates. A lack of resources, however, means the service quality has been very low.

Source: Juan Berhau, Federación de Funcionarios de las Obras Sanitarias del Estado (FFOSE), and Carlos Santos, Friends of the Earth Uruguay (REDES).

C. Global environmental change, including climate change

48. Women are extremely vulnerable to environmental change, including climate change. Increasingly the availability of water resources is fluctuating and becoming

unpredictable — too much water (flooding) or a lack of water (droughts) in certain periods. Extreme weather conditions increase the burden of water collection and threaten women's livelihoods and lives. The expected changes in biodiversity will affect women disproportionately because of their roles in agricultural production and resources collection and management. Moreover, because of their disadvantaged starting position and prevailing gender disparities, women need more time to rebuild and restore their livelihoods.

49. There are many casualties among women in disasters, in particular if women do not receive timely warnings or other information about hazards and risks or if their mobility is restricted or otherwise affected due to cultural and social constraints. Case studies indicate that women are very often highly affected by hazardous conditions and resulting disasters. Often they face increased family and community work, loss of working space and tools, intensified care-giving responsibilities, and heightened risk of domestic and sexual violence. Women's work expands greatly during disasters (of whatever size), and their access to resources — particularly land and water — for survival and recovery is constrained.

50. Women who regularly cope with all kinds of "daily" disasters develop local strategies for reducing risk and responding to natural disasters. They play an important role in disaster prevention, preparedness and response in communities and households, but are often marginalized by agencies and organizations. It is often the case that disaster recovery efforts do not recognize women's capabilities, and can in fact reinforce or exacerbate existing gender and other social inequalities.

51. A gender approach is still lacking in climate change debates and research. The lessons learned from disaster prevention and mitigation show, however, that a gender perspective is imperative in understanding and coping with the consequences of environmental change in general, and climate change (and related changes in water cycles) in particular.

Box 12

In Egypt, an innovative partnership has been created in Alexandria between women's health and environmental management and will soon integrate emergency management, leading to the training of trainers. Girls are trained as "environmental promoters", and thus empowered in the unconventional area of environmental health.

In Nepal, the participatory disaster management programme begins by convening separate gender groups to discuss the different needs and priorities of women and men, before a joint executive committee meets to refine and endorse their input. In many groups, women are active in greater numbers than men and thus women's participation in risk reduction has increased. Furthermore, women are leading mixed-sex groups, thus demonstrating their empowerment through the programme.

Source: International Strategy for Disaster Reduction Expert Group Meeting on Environmental Management and Mitigation of Natural Disasters: a gender perspective, 6-9 November 2001, Ankara.

D. Women as agents of change

52. Women throughout the world are mobilizing and demanding that their voices be heard. Their actions from the local village to the global policy-making arenas are a driving force for change and transformation. Women are advocating at the local, national and global levels to demand a human rights approach to water and other natural resources that are necessary for human survival.

53. From the 1975 World Conference of the International Year of Women, through the United Nations Decade for Women (1976-1985) and the global conferences and summits of the 1990s, women participated actively to shape economic, social, political and sustainable development, by getting the facts, strategizing, demanding accountability, lobbying, networking and building coalitions. Many are active leaders in the struggle for safe, affordable and accessible drinking water.

54. At the Second World Water Forum in the Hague in 2000 the efforts made by women groups in joining forces in the water-gender sustainability lobby resulted in the foundation of the Gender and Water Alliance (see www.genderandwateralliance.org). The Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) is also active in promoting a gender equality perspective in policies relating to access to water.

55. International alliances between women, environmentalists, human rights activists and professionals in the water and sanitation sector are yielding quantifiable results for sustainable management of water resources. Global networks of organizations working in partnership to bring the water-gender-poverty-sustainable development nexus into practice, have built global synergy for the inclusion of gender as a cross-cutting issue in the Integrated Water Resources Management. The following boxes show examples of the efforts of women's organizations in this area.

Box 13

In 1991, following the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, a proactive group of young mothers established Mama-86 as a Kiev city public organization. Today, Mama-86 has blossomed into a national environmental non-governmental organization network of 17 organizations from various regions of Ukraine, and is an active partner in Women in Europe for a Common Future.

Box 14

In Ukraine the water situation is critical. In 1997, Mama-86 kicked off a drinking water in Ukraine campaign together with 11 organizations from its network. An early initiative addressed the lack of information disclosure in the country by carrying out regular information gathering and independent research on the quality of drinking water and public opinion on the issue. Since 2001, Mama-86 has been implementing a programme of technical solutions for improving access to safe drinking water in urban and rural areas. A broad public information and education campaign was also launched, disseminating information through all available channels, including radio and television. The main objectives of the Mama-86 water campaign are to protect the drinking water sources in the country through new approaches such as eco-sanitation and organic agriculture, public education, lobbying and the development of pilot projects run by local communities.

Source: Anna Tsvetkova, Mama-86.

Box 15

Women follow a strict form of purdah in Hoto village, Baluchistan, in Pakistan. In 1994, a participatory action research team went to Hoto to help improve its water management. For a year, the men would not give permission to the team to meet the women. Eventually, the women were able to participate in a joint meeting to develop strategies to solve the drinking water problem. The men suggested extending the distribution pipes of an old government water supply scheme to all the households in the unserved area. The women put up a counter-proposal to build a new water tank on unused land, which would provide water to the non-functioning public standpipes. The community adopted the women's solution, which was far more cost-effective.

This marked a major change in the village. Now the women have become active participants in decision-making, and significant changes have been made in their lives through hygiene education. Most significant has been the demand for education for their daughters. In 1998 a new girls school was opened in Hoto. Traditional leaders have been impressed by the results of the project. The same approach is taken to other villages now.

Source: Maria Angélica Alegria/General Water Alliance, 2004.

Box 16

In 1995, the Nhouonda's community water management system in Cameroon was close to breaking down. The male-dominated village management committee was not functioning and the village women refused to pay their monthly contributions. An external team of experts that came to assist the community encouraged the women of the village to participate in the problem solving.

As a result, new pipes were bought, old, leaky pipes were replaced and broken taps were repaired. Some people were elected to collect monthly contributions for maintenance. All the women living around a standpipe organized to clean it regularly. At a later meeting, when the men insinuated that they would not cooperate with some of the decisions taken by the women, the women openly said that they had ways to sanction the men: they would refuse to give them food. A young man expressed fear of women knowing too much, which could lead to divorces in the village. A woman stood up and challenged him, saying there had been divorces before. This led to a major debate between women and men on community-based issues. A youth association is now also taking more assertive action in the community's water management.

Source: Maria Angélica Alegria/General Water Alliance, 2004.

Box 17

The Canaveralejo River, which supplies water to the 3,800 inhabitants of the town of La Serena in Colombia, was highly contaminated. In 1995 the women of the community struggled to secure leadership positions in the community action board. Eventually, supported by some dedicated men, they succeeded. "At the beginning it was tough," recalls resident Fabiola Gomez. "All organizations were run by men, and when women wanted to participate we had to impose ourselves by force. It was a hard task, but we let them see that we were also able enough, and we did better than men." Once the women were in leadership positions a treatment plant was constructed. Since then there have been many improvements. "For instance, diarrhoea and other children's skin diseases have been reduced", said resident Ms. Gomez. When cholera broke out in the Cali, La Serena was spared.

The women went on to play prominent roles in community development. Collective participation led to improvements in the power supply, paving of the streets, collecting of refuse, construction of a school and a health centre.

Source: Maria Angélica Alegria/General Water Alliance, 2004.

Box 18

Since the Second World Water Forum in 2000 at The Hague, Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF), the Netherlands Council of Women and a growing number of national and international partners have come together to work on water, sustainable development and gender issues. In partnership they have formed the Women for Water Initiative, which focuses on the full and equal participation of women in integrated water management. The Women for Water Initiative has now emerged as a full-fledged partnership of existing local women's groups and carriers of community development. The initiative stimulates women to act locally and to join forces globally.

Recent activities include gathering and disseminating information, brokering, up-scaling of successful activities, joint project development by local partners, the development of indicators for success and failure, and the promotion of Gender-Responsive Budgeting in the water and sanitation sector. A toolkit has been developed that includes good practices of partnerships and twinning between women's groups in the Netherlands and their partners in developing countries. In years to come, this approach is envisaged to result in the replication and up-scaling of other local partnerships.

Source: Alice Bouman-Dentener, Women in Europe for a Common Future, 2004.

V. Recommendations

56. The following recommendations are made:

(a) Human rights approach:

- Access to water is a basic human right that is essential for achieving gender equality, sustainable development and poverty alleviation.
- Governments are ultimately responsible for the provision of basic human needs, including adequate water and sanitation to women and their families.
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women should be ratified to remove reservations and ensure its implementation to the fullest.
- The pollution of water and environmental resources in war and conflict situations should be recognized as a crime against humanity.

(b) Women's access to and control of water and land:

- Women should be ensured access to and ownership of land.
- Women's access to water should be recognized as directly related to access to land and constitutional and legal barriers that bar women from owning or inheriting land should be eliminated.

- Local governments should support the protection of water resources from pollution and make available appropriate affordable, locally-owned technologies, which support community efforts, particularly for women.

- Effective decentralization should be promoted by transferring responsibilities and resources from the central government to the local government as service delivery and management is the responsibility of local governments.

- Central governments should focus on creating an enabling environment through regulations and tariffs favouring pro-poor and equitable service delivery.

(c) Women's access to sanitation:

- A focus on gender is of particular importance with regard to sanitation facilities, as the availability of water and sanitary facilities in schools can enable girls to get an education, and the location of water points and latrines close to the home can reduce violence against women.

- The success and effective use of sanitation facilities will depend on the involvement of both women and men in selecting the location and technology of such facilities. Women are also crucial in instilling behavioural norms in young children, including those relating to hygiene.

- National Governments should ensure that sanitation policies are gender-sensitive, by enabling the participation of women in the policy framework process. Gender provisions should address both practical and strategic needs.

(d) Gender mainstreaming:

- All water and sanitation institutions should adopt and implement a gender equity policy to ensure gender mainstreaming in policies, programmes, budgets and projects. This should also include gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation systems.

- National sanitation policies should be gender-sensitive, by enabling the participation of women in the policy framework process. Gender provisions should address both practical and strategic needs.

- Gender mainstreaming tools should be developed and used at the institutional level, including: sex-disaggregated data, gender analysis, gender balance, gender review process for country reports, gender budget initiatives, and gender-sensitive indicators (particularly indicators that cross multiple themes for achievement of the MDGs and Johannesburg Plan of Implementation).

- Gender responsive budgeting initiatives must be used in integrated water resources management to ensure accountability to commitments on gender equity, poverty eradication, sustainable development and rights-based governance.

- Gender training and awareness raising should be instituted for all staff within water institutions. Training materials about gender and poverty should be developed and targeted to senior managers and staff in national ministries and water utility boards, to municipal councillors and staff, to engineers, and

engineering colleges, to finance and planning departments, as well as personnel in operations and maintenance.

- A set of global criteria should be developed for scaling-up gender equity and social justice for the poor in the various water subsectors. These should be integrated in the national reports on the Millennium Development Goals.

(e) Promoting women's participation and empowerment:

- Water management must be democratic and transparent, and represent the needs of the people, especially women. As the primary collectors of water throughout the world, women must be recognized as major stakeholders in the decision-making process.
- Governments must consult with stakeholders at all levels of decision- and policy-making, and establish and strengthen mechanisms to facilitate the participation of all stakeholders, in particular poor women, indigenous peoples and other disadvantaged groups defined by race, ethnicity, economic status, age and religion.
- Equal representation of women (50 per cent) should be promoted in the water sector at all levels. Activities that promote women's equal participation are critical, due to the historical disadvantage faced by women.
- Partnerships between Governments, non-governmental organizations and donors should be formalized and core funding should be made available for women's non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations to facilitate their meaningful contribution in all critical phases of policy and project design and implementation.
- Resources should be allocated to women's organizations for projects related to water, sanitation, and human settlements, including water resources management, capacity development and training for women in water-related professions.

(f) Private sector involvement in water resources management:

- Water must be identified primarily as a public good and human right and not simply as a commodity to be traded in the open market. As a public good, water must be managed for social needs and environmental sustainability rather than for short-term profit.
- The specific impact that privatization of goods and services like water has on the livelihoods of women, in particular poor women, should be recognized.
- Shifting responsibility from Governments to large private corporations is problematic, as profits often supersede human needs and rights. Policies that favour privatization of public services remain largely unaccountable to the people they are supposed to benefit.
- The private sector should be required to disclose publicly details of their operations related to water, including information on turnover, profit, number of service delivery sites, average cost, capital expenditure, transaction with parent company and outstanding debts.

(g) Resource mobilization:

- Funds and other resources should be allocated to civil society organizations, in particular those focused on women, recognizing that women are full partners and not a recipient target group for water and sanitation projects to increase the capacity enhancement and development of poor women and girls, and to women's organizations based on their own priorities.

(h) Human settlements from a gender perspective:

- The expertise, priorities and solutions of grass-roots women's groups should be solicited, validated and remunerated. These organizations should be given the resources to enrich, expand and consolidate their knowledge and skill base.
- Institutional expertise, resources and contacts should be used to provide back-up support to grass-roots initiatives and enable scaling-up of grass-roots practices should be enabled.
- New channels should be created and existing ones opened up for grass-roots expertise to enter decision-making on all levels of policy-making, political administration as well as in civil society, like media, foundations, banks and education institutions.
- Initiatives by local institutions in partnering with grass-roots women's groups should be supported as a way of building institutional capacity.
- Resources and information should be put in the hands of grass-roots women's groups.
- Resources and an enabling policy environment should be provided for grass-roots women to field-test strategies learned through peer learning processes.
- Grass-roots women should be enabled to develop their own criteria to evaluate success.

Notes

[1] Barlow, Maude and Clarke, Tony. *Blue Gold: the Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's Water* (The New Press, New York) 2002, p. 76.

[2] "HIV/AIDS and Gender Equality", Gender and Development Briefing Notes, World Bank, 2002, see www.worldbank.org/gender/resources/briefing/hivaids.pdf.

[3] Baylies, C. "The Impact of Aids on Rural Households in Africa: A shock like any other?" *Development and Change*, 2002, vol. 33 No. (4): pp.611-632.

[4] See www.sspindia.org for more details on Swayam Shikshan Prayog's experiences in post-disaster reconstruction in maharashtra and Gujarat. For more on the experiences of Foundation for the Support of Women's Work in Turkey, see Ackar, S. "Grassroots Women's Collectives' Roles in Post-Disaster Effort: Potential for Sustainable Partnership and Good Governance" (Lessons learned from the Marmara Earthquake in Turkey.) prepared for the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction Expert Group Meeting on Environmental Management and the Mitigation of Natural Disasters: a gender perspective, 6-9 November 2001, Ankara, Turkey.

[5] Women's Environment and Development Organization (2001). Getting the Balance Right: Strategies for Change. www.wedo.org.